

Message Text

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43

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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S E C R E T VIENTIANE 0948

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS MASS, MCAP, MOPS, LA

SUBJECT: DISCUSSIONS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN THE COURSE OF A LONG CONVERSATION WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK LAST NIGHT I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO URGE THAT CERTAIN ACTIONS BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE FAR LOGISTICS SYSTEM. WE ALSO DISCUSSED THE RAPIDITY WITH WHICH PROGRESS TOWARD THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE TAKING PLACE AND THE POLITICAL TENSIONS ENGENDERED IN SOUTH LAOS BY THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS LEADING TO THE CROWN PRINCE'S LAST-MINUTE DECISION TO SUSPEND HIS TRIP TO THE AREA. END SUMMARY

1. THIS CONVERSATION WITH SISOUK GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRIEF HIM ON MY VISITS TO MILITARY REGIONS ONE, TWO AND THREE, DURING WHICH I HAVE INSPECTED VERY THOROUGHLY THE FAR LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE SYSTEMS. I TOLD SISOUK I THOUGHT THE NEW UNITED STATES METHODOLOGY WHICH WAS BEING PUT INTO EFFECT WAS WORKING AS WELL AS COULD BE EXPECTED EXCEPT IN MR-TWO WHERE VANG PAO DID NOT APPEAR TO HAVE THE FOGGIEST NOTION OF THE STEPS WHICH MUST BE TAKEN TO CREATE A LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE SYSTEM.

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2. I TOLD SISOUK THAT THE SITUATION IN MR-TWO WAS SUCH THAT I HAD DIRECTED THAT URGENT AND IMMEDIATE AMERICAN ASSISTANCE BE GIVEN TO VANG PAO TO STRAIGHTEN OUT HIS LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE CAPABILITY. I POINTED OUT TO

SISOUK THAT THERE WERE STEPS THE RLG HAD TO TAKE TO MAKE THIS SYSTEM EFFECTIVE IN THE FUTURE. THE PRINCIPAL ONE BEING THE ISSUANCE OF A ROYAL DECREE ABOLISHING THE OLD FRENCH STAFF STRUCTURE AND PROVIDING FOR THE NEW LOGISTICS ORGANIZATIONS HAD TO BE ISSUED PROMPTLY. THIS WOULD PERMIT THE ASSIGNMENT OF NECESSARY PERSONNEL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CLEAR-CUT LINES OF COMMAND. SISOUK APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM PERFECTLY AND HE SAID HE WOULD TAKE

APPROPRIATE ACTION. HE REVIEWED THE INTERNAL POLITICS OF FAR BEARING ON THIS PROBLEM. HOWEVER I HAVE THE FEELING THAT DESPITE SISOUK'S BRAVE WORDS, LAO LOGROLLING MAY ONCE AGAIN PREVAIL OVER THE LOGISTICAL IMPERATIVES CITED ABOVE.

3. SISOUK SIOMED RELATIVELY UNCONCERNED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS APPARENTLY SIDED WITH THE PATHET LAO ON THE ISSUE OF THE ROLE OF THE JOINT POLICE FORCE IN VIENTIANE AND LUANG PRABANG. INSOFAR AS I CAN MAKE OUT SOUVANNA TOOK THIS ACTION UNILATERALLY. SISOUK CONFIRMED THE IMPRESSION I WAS GIVEN BY MY RUSSIAN COLLEAGUE AT THE ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM YESTERDAY THAT PROGRESS TOWARD FORMATION OF THE PGNU WAS BEING MADE VERY RAPIDLY. SISOUK BELIEVES THAT THE CURRENT GOSSIP IN VIENTIANE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORMED PRIOR TO THE END OF FEBRUARY IS OVERLY OPTIMISTIC BUT HE BELIEVES THE PRESENT PROCESS IS MOVING RAPIDLY AND INEXORABLY.

4. SISOUK IS TAKING VERY SERIOUSLY THE REFUSAL, ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY, OF THE CROWN PRINCE TO ATTEND THE WAT PHOU FESTIVAL IN MR-IVB HE SAID THAT PRINCE BOUN OUM HAD VIEWED THE VISIT AS A MAJOR STEP TOWARD RECONCILIATION AMONG THE RIVAL FAMILIES AND HAD GONE TO GREAT PERSONAL LENGTHS TO MAKE THE VISIT A SUCCESS. THE LAST-MINUTE REFUSAL OF THE CROWN PRINCE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE
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GROUND THAT THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN SAVANNAKHET CREATED POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY WAS SHORTSIGHTED AND COWARDLY. THE ROYAL FAMILY DID NOTHING BUT LOUNGE IN LUANG PRABANG "MAKING CHILDREN". PRINCE BOUN OUM WOULD BE FURIOUS AND A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL ROW WAS BREWING WHICH WOULD LAST A LONG TIME. (SISOUK, AS A BOUN GM KINSMAN ABOUT TO MARRY A LUANG PRABANG PRINCESS, IS THE INDIVIDUAL MOST PERSONALLY CAUGHT IN THIS FLORENTINE CRACK).
WHITEHOUSE

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